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ACCOUNT
OF THE
BRIMHAM ROCKS
IN
YORKSHIRE.

By HAYMAN ROOKE, Esq.

Read at the SOCIETY of ANTIQUARIES, May 25, 1786.

LONDON,
Printed by JOHN NICHOLS, Printer to the SOCIETY.
MDCCLXXXVII.

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*Some Account of the Brimham Rocks in Yorkshire. In
a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Norris, Secretary. By
Hayman Rooke, Esq.*

SIR,

THE success I met with in discovering the Druidical monuments in Derbyshire (which I had the honour to lay before the Society [a]), induced me to make an excursion into Yorkshire, to examine some curious groups of rocks, seven miles from Ripley, on the road to Pateley Bridge, called Brimham rocks. They are indeed a most wonderful assemblage, scattered about the moor in groupes, which all together occupy a space of above forty acres. The extraordinary position of these rocks in a variety of directions must have been occasioned by some violent convulsion of nature; but at the same time it is evident, that art has not been wanting to make their situations still more wonderful.

The ancients of very remote antiquity have shewed a regard to fragments of rocks. The learned Mr. Bryant tells us, “ that
“ the Egyptians looked upon these with a degree of veneration,
“ and some of them they kept as they found them with per-
“ haps only an hieroglyphic, others they shaped with tools, and
“ formed into various devices [b]:” Again he says, “ it was
“ usual with much labour to place one vast stone upon another

[a] See vol. VII. p. 175.

[b] Analysis of Ant. Mythology, vol. III. p. 53.

“ for a religious memorial : the stones, thus placed, they often-
 “ times poized so equally that they were affected with the least
 “ external force, nay a breath of wind would sometimes make
 “ them vibrate. We have many instances of this nature in our
 “ own country ; and they are to be found in other parts of the
 “ world, and whenever they occur we may esteem them of the
 “ highest antiquity [c].”

On this moor we find rocks placed one upon another ; others that rock ; and some have evidently the mark of the tool, but whether these are the works of the Druids or of a more remote age, I must leave to the learned Society to determine ; but, if I might venture to form a conjecture on these very ancient customs, may we not suppose, that, as the Britons had early communications with the Egyptians and Phœnicians, their arts, and particularly their religious ceremonies, would be handed down to the time of our Druids, who would probably be, from political motives, not inclined to communicate their knowledge to the ignorant Britons, whom they were supposed to have governed with absolute authority, and by their augury and divinations brought them to submit patiently to their decrees, and to undertake the most arduous enterprize. In the more civilized ages of Christianity, the heads of the Romish church have thought it necessary to keep the common people in ignorance : why then may we not suppose that the Druids had some knowledge of arts and sciences, which from the same motive they kept to themselves. Their not committing their mysteries of their order and discipline to writing is, I think, a circumstance in favour of the above supposition. But to return to Brimham rocks.

In Pl. XVI. N° 1. (a) appears to have been a rock idol : the marks of the tool are visible in many places, particularly on the

[c] Analysis of Ant. Mythol. vol. III. p. 532.

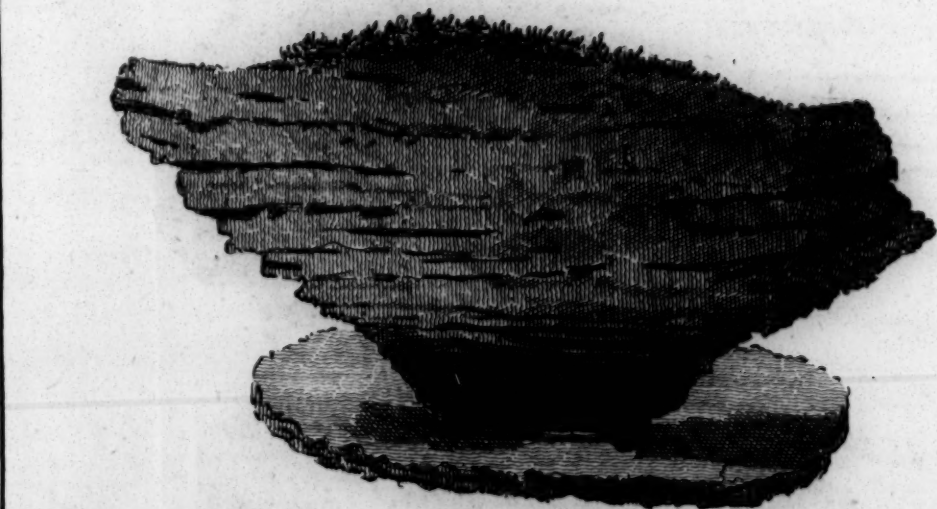
N^o 1.



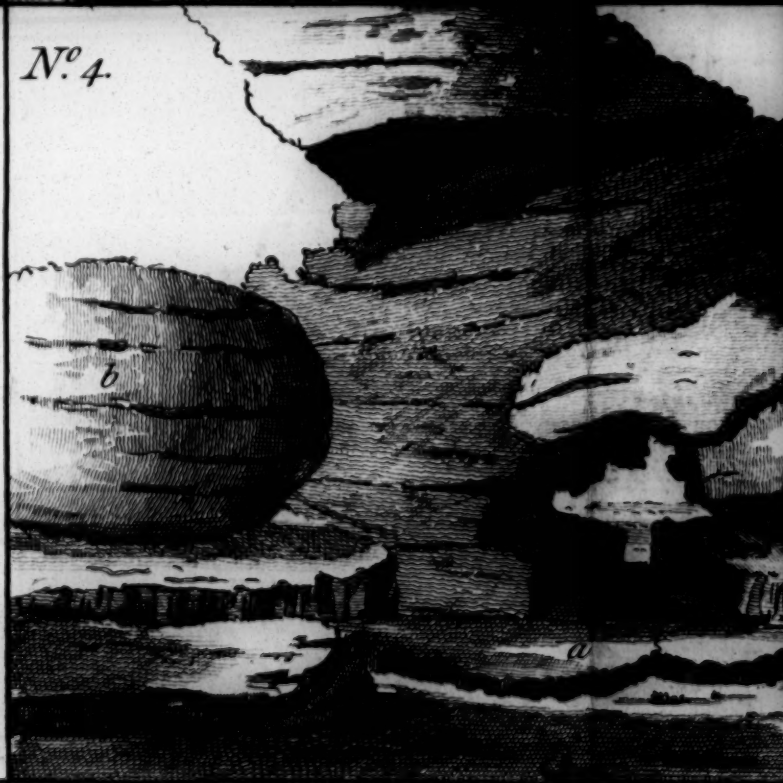
N^o 2.



N^o 3.



N^o 4.



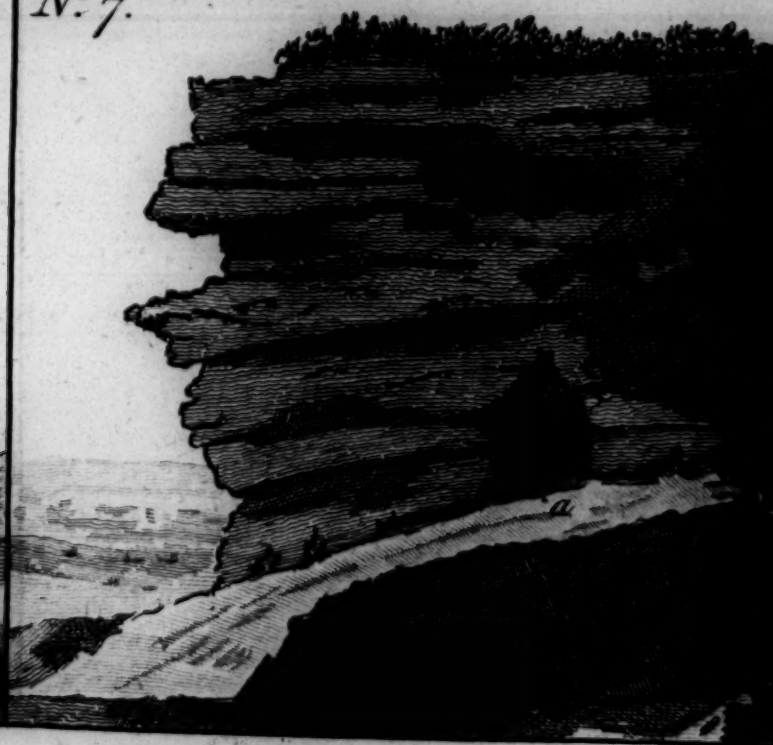
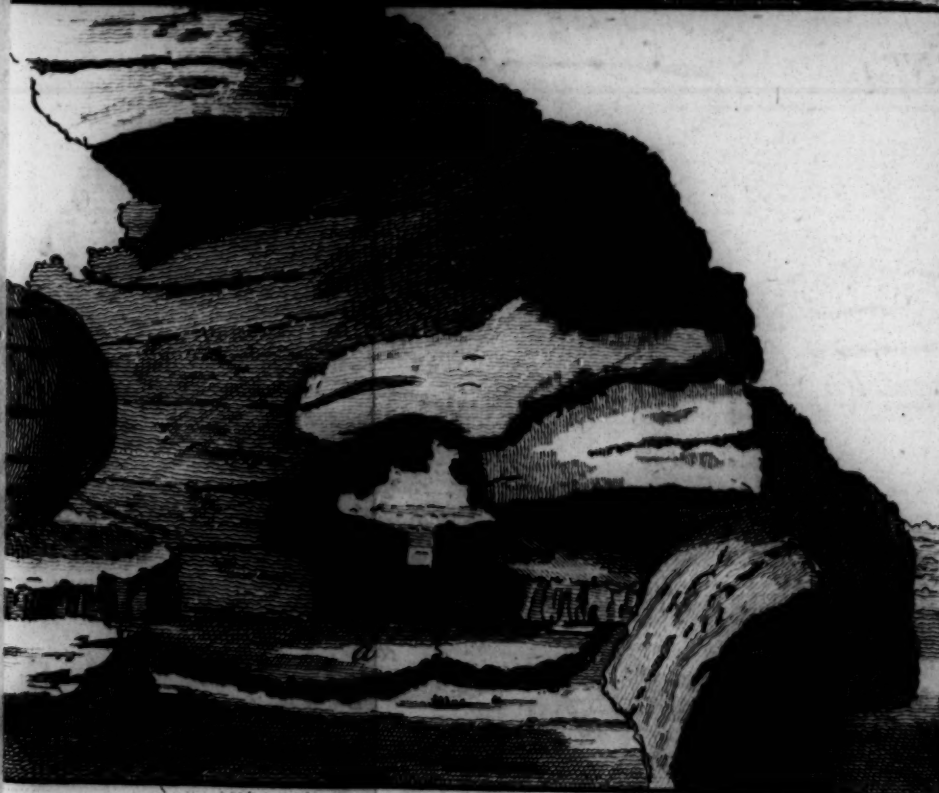
H. Rook del.

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N^o 5.

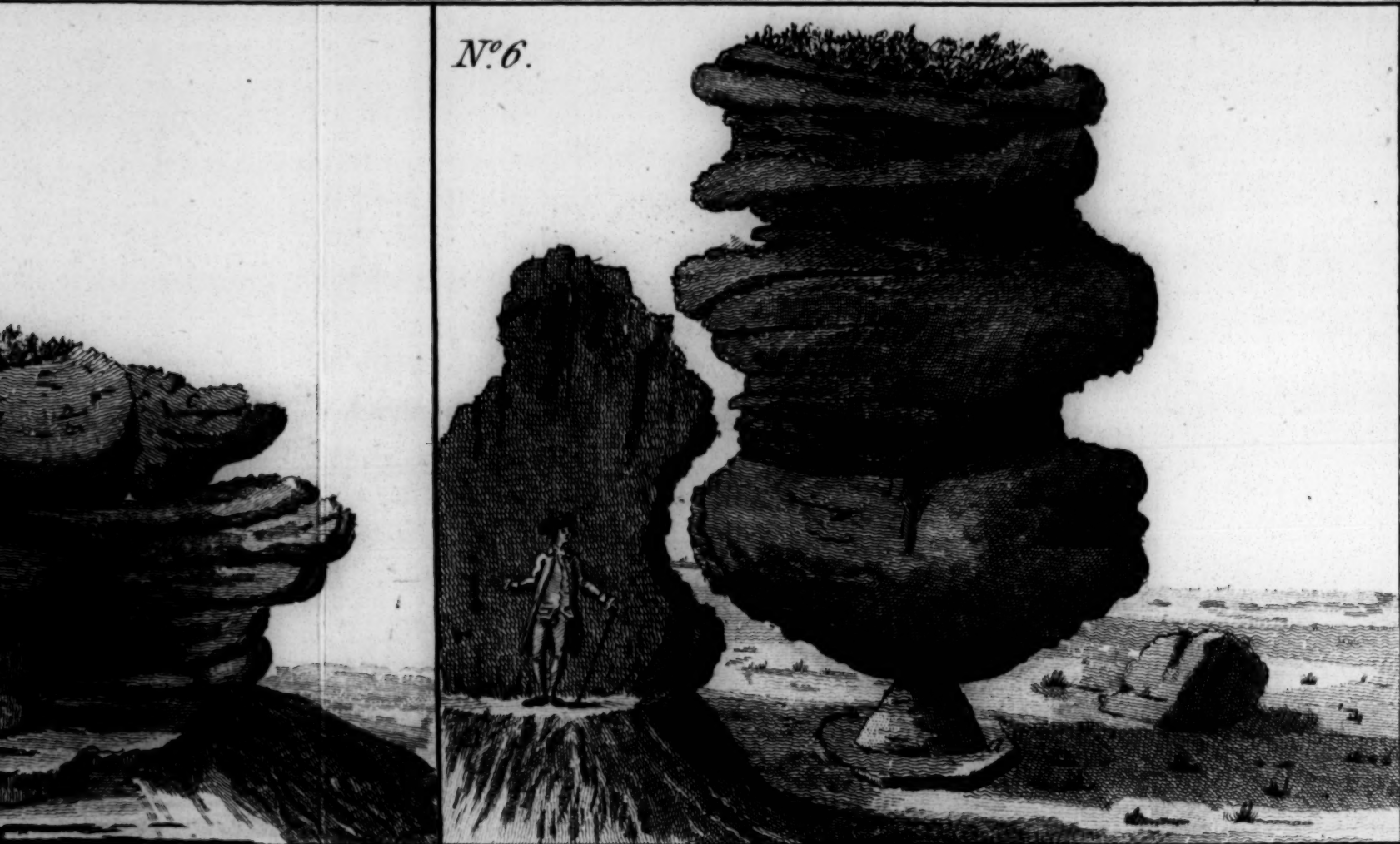


N^o 7.

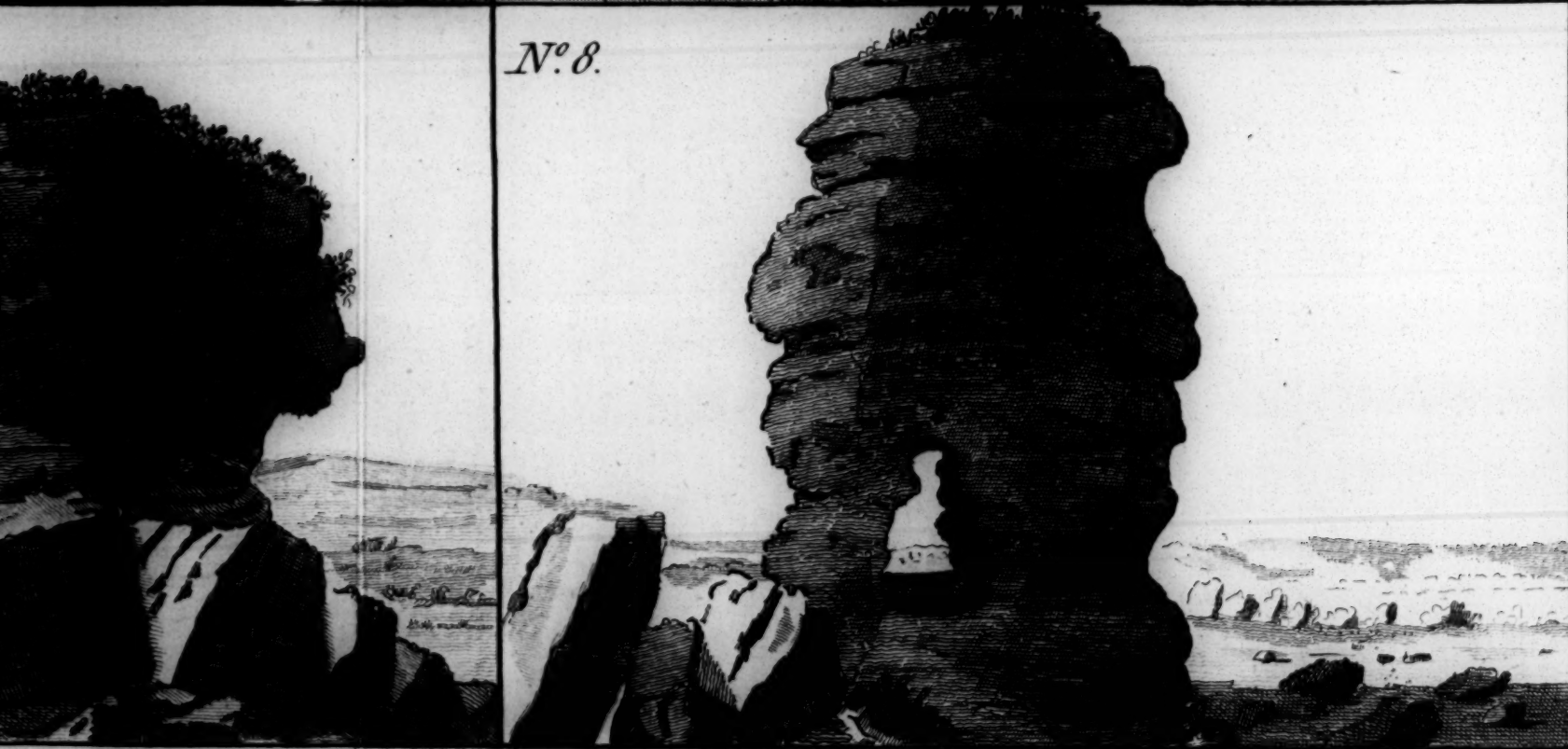


Brimham rocks, Yorkshire.

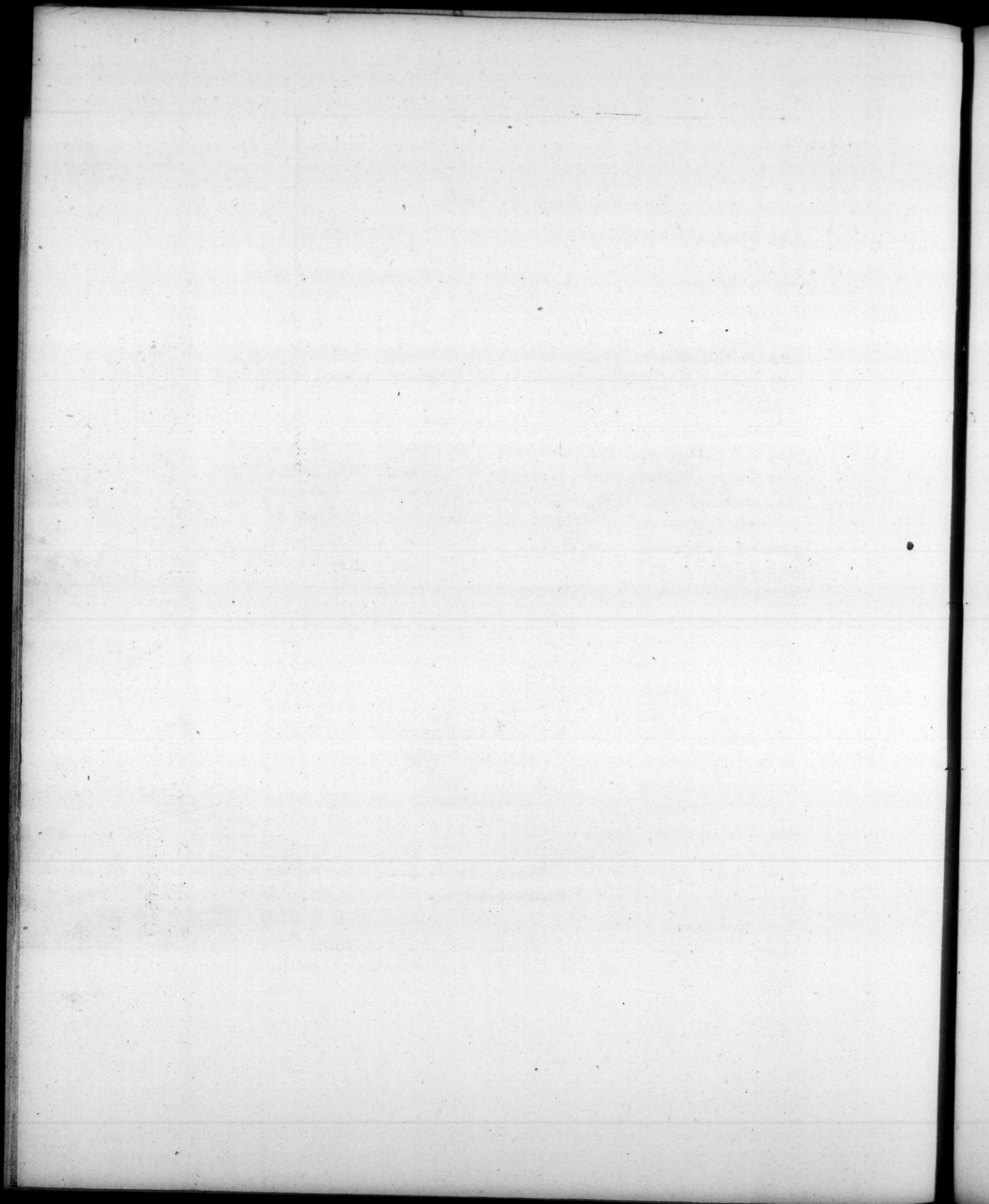
N^o 6.



N^o 8.



Bafire Sc.



base, where the side (b) has been cut square; contiguous to it, is a rocking stone (c), which moves with great ease.

N° 2. is another view of the same rocking stone (c), which is in length eight feet, in breadth three feet.

N° 3. is a rocking stone, the bottom of which evidently appears to have been cut away to form two knobs, on which it rests, and moves with great ease. Its length is eighteen feet, width four feet, height six feet.

N° 4. is a large mass of rock, which doctor Borlase calls a Tolmen. A passage goes quite through it, big enough for a man to pass; at each entrance there appears to have been a rock basin three feet diameter, now almost worn level, but the circles are still very visible; at the foot of the passage is a little kind of platform (a), which plainly appears to have been worked with a tool; adjoining to this Tolmen is a rocking stone (b), in length six feet three inches, breadth four feet eight inches.

N° 5. is an extraordinary groupe of rocks, in which there seems to be a kind of uniformity preserved. On the top are three rocking stones; the middle one (a) rests upon a kind of pedestal, and is supposed to be about one hundred tons weight; on each side at (b) and (c) is a small one: on examining the stone (b) it appeared to have been shaped to a small knob at the bottom to give it motion, though my guide, who was seventy years old, born on the moors, and well acquainted with these rocks, assured me that stone had never been known to rock: however, upon my making a trial round it, when I came to the middle of one side, I found it moved with great ease. The astonishing increase of the motion with the little force I gave it made me very apprehensive the equilibrium might be destroyed; but on examining it, I found it was so nicely balanced, that there was no danger of its falling. The construction of this equipoized stone must have been by artists well skilled in the powers of mecha-

tics. It is indeed the most extraordinary rocking stone I ever met with, and it is somewhat as extraordinary, that it never should have been discovered before, and that it should now move so easily, after so many ages of rest.

N° 6. is a north view of a very singular rock in a wonderful position. It must undoubtedly have been a rock idol, or a stone consecrated to some principal deity. It is forty-six feet in circumference, and seems to have been separated from the adjoining rock. The pedestal it rests upon is at the top only one foot by two feet seven inches. The marks of the tool are visible in many places, particularly on the base (a) of the pedestal, which has been shaped into a polygon tending towards a hexagon, but part of the sides has been defaced by time. The hazardous undertaking of shaping this rock and pedestal is, I think, another proof of the Druids having had some knowledge of mechanism. We are well assured that the ancients shaped rocks into various forms, for some mystical purpose. Doctor Borlase tells us, "that the rocks in Cornwall have, in some instances, been cleared of their wildest excrescences by art, in others evidently shaped and fitted by tools, and this could not be done without some aim or design, and no design so likely as that some by shewing themselves to greater advantage (being separated from the adjoining rocks), might by their vastness more easily procure the adoration of the beholder, that others by being shaped in a particular manner might be more significant symbols of that deity, or attribute which they were designed to represent [d]."

N° 7. represents an east view of a very singular kind of monument, which I believe has never been taken notice of by any antiquary. I think I may call it an *oracular stone*, though it

[d] Antiquities of Cornwall, p. 172.

goes by the name of the *Great Cannon*. It rests upon a bed of rock, where a road plainly appears to have been made leading to the hole (a), which at the entrance is three feet wide, six feet deep, and about three feet six inches high. Within this aperture on the right hand is a round hole, marked (b), two feet diameter, perforated quite through the rock, sixteen feet, and running from south to north. In the abovementioned aperture, a man might lay concealed, and predict future events to those that came to consult the oracle, and is heard distinctly on the north side of the rock, where the hole is not visible. This might make the credulous Britons think the predictions proceeded solely from the rock deity. The voice on the outside is as distinctly conveyed to the person in the aperture, as was several times tried. The circumference of this rock is ninety-six feet.

There is reason to suppose, that people in the dark ages of Druidism imagined that the rock idols had a power of articulation. "There is a remarkable story in Giraldus Cambrensis [e], which shows that the common people in his days attributed the power both of speaking and protecting to these sacred rocks. There was a large flat stone ten feet long, six wide, and one foot thick, which in his time served as a bridge over the river Alun, at St. David's, in Pembrokehire. It was called in British *Leek Lavar*, that is, the *speaking stone*, and the vulgar tradition was, that when a dead body was, on a time, carrying over, this stone spoke, and with the struggle of the voice cracked in the middle, and the chink, from which the voice issued, was then to be seen. In this simple story the remains of that part of the Druid superstition, of which we are treating, are clearly to be perceived [f]."

[e] Itinerar. Cambr. lib. ii. c. 1.

[f] Borlase's Antiquities of Cornwall, p. 170.

Another ancient monument of this kind of Druidical superstition is now to be seen in Westminster; I mean the stone under the coronation chair, which was called by the ancient Irish *liag-fail*, or the *fatal stone*, on which “ the kings of Ireland “ used to be inaugurated in the times of Heathenism on the “ hill of Tarah, which, being inclosed in a wooden chair, was “ thought to emit a sound under the rightful candidate (a thing “ easily managed by the Druids), but to be mute under a man “ of none or bad title, that is, one who was not for the turn of “ those priests. The Druidical oracle is in verse, and in these “ original words :

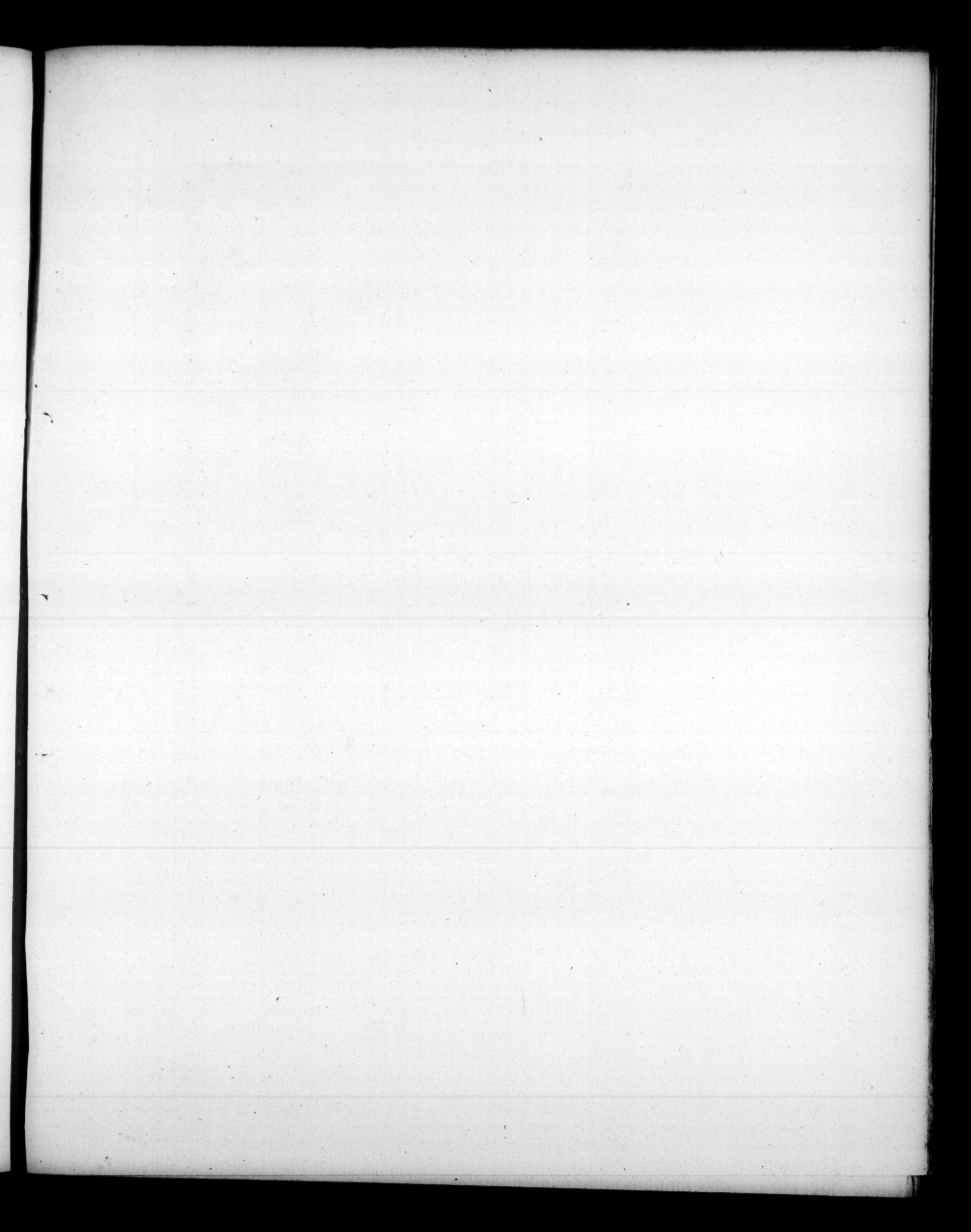
Cioniodh feuit fuos an fine,
 Man ba breag an Faisdine,
 Mas a bhfuighid an Lia-fail,
 Dlighid flaitheas do gha bhail.

“ The Lowland Scots have rhym'd it thus :

Except old saws do feign,
 And wizards wits be blind,
 The Scots in place must reign,
 Where they this stone shall find [g].”

Hence it appears that the Druids had oracles, that they attributed the power of speaking to their sacred rocks. I therefore think I may venture to say, with some degree of probability, that these perforated rocks are Druidical oracles. There are others on this moor; one about a quarter of a mile S. W. of the above-mentioned stone, which the country people call the *Little Cannon*, the hole is one foot diameter, and goes quite through the rock eighteen feet.

About eighty yards S. W. of the oracular stone, or great cannon, is a large tumulus of earth and stones one hundred and fifty



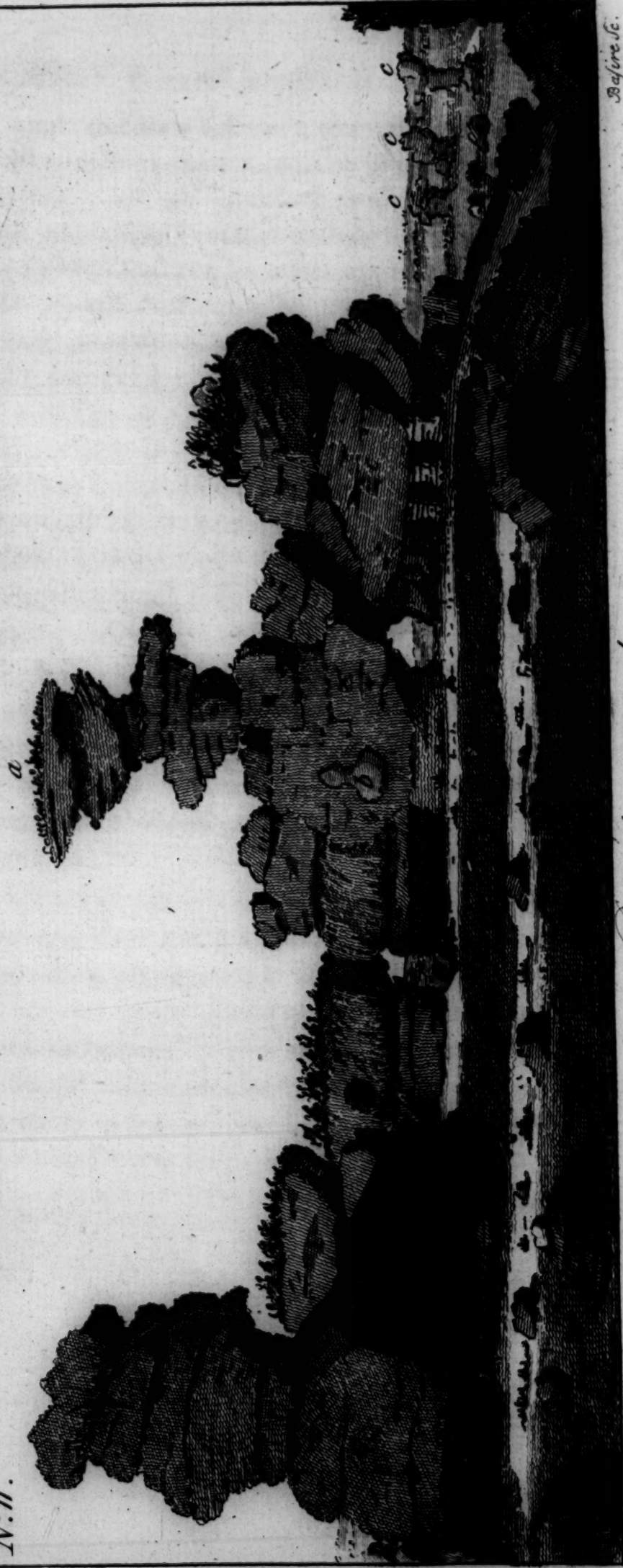
N^o 9.



N^o 10.



N^o 11.



H. Rock del.

Brimham rocks.

Bagin del.

feet in circumference: on the west side there seems to have been a little ditch and vallum, which probably inclosed the tumulus, and may have been destroyed for the repair of walls and roads, a thing which too frequently happens to these ancient monuments. About a quarter of a mile farther to the west is a Druid circle, with a vallum of earth and stones, thirty feet diameter. It is exactly of the same construction as those on Stanton Moor, in the Peak of Derbyshire [b]. There are likewise several small tumuli. Thirteen of them are ranged in a kind of circle, the largest not above eighteen feet diameter. They are formed of earth and large stones. Two of these I opened; towards the bottom, the effects of fire appeared on the stones, and ashes were scattered about, but there were no urns to be found.

Here are several rocks that have passages cut through them. N° 8. is a S. W. view of a rock with an aperture three feet and a half wide, in which is a rock basin three feet diameter.

N° 9. Pl. XVII. is an east view of a rock, where art seems to have been aiding in the singularity of its position; a rock basin appears at (a), and from the lips or channels on the sides (for the water to run off), we may conclude there are more on the top; but that could not be examined from its elevated situation.

N° 10. is a west view of a rock, called by the country people *Noonstone*, from its casting a shadow on a cottage at 12 o'clock. On Midsummer Eve fires are lighted on the side (a). Its situation is apposite for this purpose, being on the edge of a hill commanding an extensive view. This custom is of the most remote antiquity. The learned and ingenious Mr. Brand says, “the origin of this fire, still retained by so many nations, and which loses itself in antiquity, is very simple. It was a *feu de joie* kindled the very moment the year began; for the first of all

[b] *Archæologia*, vol. VI. p. 114.

“ years,

“ years, and the most antient that we know of, began at the
 “ month of June; thence the very name of this month, *Junior*,
 “ the *youngest which is renewed*; while that of the preceding
 “ one is *Mag, major*, the *antient*: thus the one was the month
 “ of the young people, the other that of the old [*i*].”

Toland tells us “ that the Celtic nations kindled fires on Mid-
 “ summer Eve, which are still continued by the Roman Catho-
 “ lics of Ireland making them in all their grounds, and carry-
 “ ing flaming brands about their cornfields. This they do like-
 “ wise all over France, and in some of the Scottish isles. These
 “ Midsummer fires and sacrifices were to obtain a blessing on
 “ the fruits of the earth, now becoming ready for gathering;
 “ as those of the first of May, that they might prosperously
 “ grow; and those of the last of October were a thanksgiving
 “ for finishing their harvest [*k*].”

Hence we find, that this very ancient custom of lighting fires
 at particular seasons is handed down to the present time. “ The
 “ Druids had also their holy fires, to which the people were
 “ obliged to come and carry off some portion (for which they
 “ doubtless payed according to their abilities) to kindle the fire
 “ in their own houses [*l*].”

From what has been said on this ancient custom, I think we
 have reason to conclude, that these extraordinary rocks in this
 district, particularly where art appears to have had a hand in the
 formation, are monuments of the Druids.

N^o 11. is a north view of a surprising assemblage of rocks,
 which cannot but attract the admiration of every one that see
 them. This seems to have been a chosen spot for their religious
 ceremonies: here we find rock idols, altars, circular holes evi-

[*i*] Observations on Popular Antiquities, chap. xxvii. p. 297.

[*k*] Toland, vol. I. p. 73.

[*l*] Borlase, Antiquities of Cornwall, p. 147

dently cut in the sides of rocks, and passages between rocks, for some sacred mysterious purpose. The rocks piled one upon another at (a) are in a very extraordinary position: (b) is a very singular figure cut in the solid rock in high relief; this possibly might have been emblematical of some principal deity, to whom these consecrated stones were dedicated; (c) is a kind of cromlech or altar, where probably sacrifices were offered up to the principal stone deity. The short pillars that support the cromlech have been formed with a tool; the stone (d) has a circular hole cut in its side, and seems to have been shaped by art. About a quarter of a mile S. W. of these rocks at (e) are seen three rock idols.

However fanciful conjectures may appear to be on monuments of remote antiquity, yet when we come to compare the accounts of learned authors on this subject with the scattered remains that are now left, there certainly will be some foundation for those conjectures.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

H. ROOKE.



density cut in the lines of rocks and passages between rocks, for some traced mysterious passages. The rocks piled one upon another at (a) are in a very extraordinary position; (b) is a very singular figure cut in the hill rock in high relief; this possibly might have been emblematical of some principal deity to whom these consecrated forms were dedicated; (c) is a kind of cross-like or star-shaped rock, which possibly had some other meaning principal than deity. The topography of the district is such that have been formed with a tool; but there (d) has a circular hole cut in the rock, and it is not to have been shaped by nature. About a quarter of a mile S.W. of these rocks, there are three rock pillars. However, the rock pillars are now almost all cut down, and the remains of the ancient monuments are now only to be seen in the account of the antiquaries. The rock pillars are now the remains of the ancient monuments that are now left, and the rock pillars are now the remains of the ancient monuments that are now left.

1845

John Hall, Esq.

1845

